

## A HALF CENTURY OF DUXBURY BEACH

For more than 30 years before 1919 Duxbury Beach was owned by members of the Wright family, the wealthiest family in town who owned the once splendid estate opposite the public library. However fantastic the idea may seem in the light of present knowledge of the instability of the beach, they had serious plans, as shown by old time maps, for developing the full length of the beach in small house lots.

Undeterred by the famed 1898 storm, they built 3 fairly sizable cottages, one at High Pines and 2 between High Pines and the bridge.

In 1919 the executor of the Estate of Georgianna B. Wright offered the property for sale. With the plans for real estate development known and the even more serious danger that the beach might develop along Revere Beach or Coney Island lines, a meeting was held and some 18 to 20 loyal Duxburyites raised enough money to buy the property. Title was taken on Nov. 29, 1919, in the name of Duxbury Beach Association, a common law trust organized for the purpose of acquiring the beach and protecting it for the benefit of Duxbury.

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Lest this trust ever deviate from its purpose, the trust agreement provided that shares could never be transferred to anyone not owning Duxbury real

estate. Technically a "private enterprise," the association pays town taxes, but no dividends have ever been paid on its shares, and its trustees serve without compensation.

#### Titles Adjusted

When the beach was acquired there were about 18 houses or

shacks and 3 large shooting stands on the property south of the area now marked by the park gates. Some had been on the beach so long the owners claimed to have acquired title to the land under their houses by undisturbed occupancy for more than 20 years. About 2-thirds of these houses and all the shooting stands have been removed, destroyed or torn down, and it may be of interest to recall that the 3 Wright houses previously mentioned were floated across the bay and relocated on Landing Rd., in South Duxbury by Walter Prince.

In 1926 and 1931 the as

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Duxbury-Marshfield boundary line. Legislative committees held hearings and Duxbury people organized in opposition to the plan. At the annual town meeting in March, 1929, the meeting disapproved the proposed acquisition by vote of 113 to 46. It voted 102 to 2 that is such a reservation were established, the State should provide a direct approach not running through any of the main streets or thickly settled parts of the town.

of the beach.

By unanimous vote the town meeting accepted the report and adopted the recommendations of the committee.

#### Action Taken

This arrangement, first established so many years ago, required and has usually received the continuous cooperation of the town and of the Duxbury Beach Association. As the use of the beach grew both by Duxbury people and others, the policing problems of the town increased and beginning in 1950 the Selectmen charged \$1 for a season's sticker, the money to go into the town treasury. In the past 20 years the Beach Association has many times enlarged the parking areas and maintains them at its own expense. Until 1941 the public parking space at the north end was so far from the beach

bought this land to further its long range objective of protecting the beach against exploitation.

The Gurnet or Powder Point Bridge was originally a Duxbury project. It was dedicated on Oct. 21, 1892. For years, however, the cost of maintaining it was paid one-third by Duxbury, one-third by Plymouth County and one-third by Plymouth, Kingston and Marshfield. In 1938 there was agitation for giving residents of the other towns privileges on Duxbury Beach like those enjoyed by Duxbury people or alternatively for relieving the other towns and the county of their share of the cost of maintaining the bridge. As a result, a county committee was appointed, which included Sidney Soule of Duxbury. The committee recommended that control and ownership

sociation's title to the beach was confirmed by the Massachusetts Land Court, a result which required negotiation and litigation extending over 10 years, the acquisition of marshlands bordering the beach, and the spending of thousands of dollars financed by additional subscriptions from the shareholders.

During the early years the only practicable automobile access to Duxbury Beach was over the Gurnet or Powder Point Bridge. By the mid 1920s automobile traffic and the use of beaches by the public was rapidly increasing and the situation worsened until every pleasant Sunday all of the bridge and adjacent Powder Point streets were completely lined with parked cars. This greatly limited the use of the beach by Duxbury people and created not only a nuisance but a real danger of catastrophe. The problem was considered by various town committees and the results of their deliberations are published in the town report.

#### Proposals

In 1928 a bill was introduced into the Massachusetts Legislature providing for State acquisition of several beaches, including Duxbury Beach. As a result of the bill a recess commission was appointed. It visited Duxbury and reported to the 1929 Legislature recommending an extended taking, including all of Duxbury Beach from the Duxbury-Plymouth line on the south to a line north of the

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Interestingly enough, it also voted 80 to 40 that Gurnet Bridge should be retained as a foot passage only! As walking has become almost a lost art, it is doubtful if the town would now wish Gurnet Bridge restricted to foot traffic, but probably the sentiment of the town is today even more opposed to a state taking of the beach than was the case in 1929.

Having defeated the attempt at state ownership, the town did not allow matters to drift but at a special town meeting directed the moderator to appoint a committee to consider a solution of the traffic and beach problems. This committee, with Benjamin Goodrich as chairman, reported to the annual town meeting on March 7, 1931. The report was printed by the town in pamphlet form. A careful reading of the complete report will well repay anyone interested in the beach, bridge and attendant traffic problems of today; for many of its long range recommendations became part of the policy of the Duxbury Beach Association and were subsequently carried out, and the solution it recommended has endured for 20 years. The committee's immediate recommendations were:

1. to eliminate traffic jams and avoid danger of catastrophe, that the town forbid parking on Gurnet Bridge and on adjacent Powder Point streets;

2. that the town ask the Duxbury Beach Association to develop at its expense a small parking space at the beach end of the bridge to be open without charge for use by Duxbury residents only and a large parking space at the northern end of the beach for the use of the people of the State generally;

3. that the town agree in return for such cooperation to police the parking spaces and extend the road to the large parking space to be developed at the northern end

Bay side of the beach that public bathing was for all practical purposes limited to the outer beach. In 1941, therefore, to satisfy the demands of the public for bathing in the bay, the association extended the road from the old northerly parking space to the cove of the beach and there built an entirely new parking space and the public bathhouse and lunchroom now known as the Pavilion. These improvements were financed in part by additional subscriptions from shareholders and in part from proceeds of sale for summer residence purposes of small parcels of land outside the park area at the extreme north end of the beach.

For the first 17 years the northerly parking space and facilities were operated by T. Waldo Herrick and for the last 3 years they have been operated by Ralph Blakeman. It would appear from the testimony at the 1950 Legislative Hearing that the Beach Association and their operators have usually succeeded in keeping the public happy; and it is the Beach Association's policy to try to keep the northern parking space for the use of the public and the Gurnet Bridge parking space for the use of Duxbury people large enough to take care of all comers even on the few most popular holidays of the year.

Sometime in 1933 or 1934 it was learned that a substantial amount of ocean beach frontage in Plymouth, just south of the Duxbury-Plymouth line together with a considerable amount of marshland in back of it, had come on the market and the Beach Association

ship of the bridge be transferred to Duxbury. Apparently the town preferred to assume the entire expense of maintaining the bridge rather than to lose its exclusive rights at the beach end of the bridge, for a special town meeting in July, 1939, it voted in favor of legislation to accomplish the recommended action. Duxbury citizens helped get the legislation into proper form and the bridge and its approaches were transferred to Duxbury as of Jan. 1, 1941, the cost of the legal work involved being split 50-50 between the town and Beach Association. Thus was accomplished another of the long-range recommendations in the 1932 Goodrich committee report.

#### Came The War

Due to gasoline rationing, relatively little use was made of the beach during the war years. The association gave the Army free rights to the use of the beach, and it was used for patrol and to a moderate extent for training troops.

In 1943 the Beach Association was asked to give the government a right-of-way for the construction of a road from Gurnet Bridge to Gurnet Point for Army use. The trustees felt from many years of experience that the construction and maintenance of such a road would be unnecessarily difficult and costly and advised the government that while they were willing to give the right of way if necessary for national defense, they felt it would be far less expensive for the Army to use properly designed vehicles for transportation to Gurnet. Government officials adopted this recommendation.

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Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, December 5, 1974

### Duxbury Beach (Continued from last week)

The Town War Memorial Committee named at the 1946 town meeting conceived the idea of setting aside part of Duxbury Beach as a war memorial and had negotiations with Duxbury Beach Association on the proposition. Two methods were considered -- acquisition by the town and acquisition by a new charitable trust. Both of these proposals ran into legal difficulties, as a joint opinion of the Duxbury Town Counsel and the Beach Association lawyer held that if the town owned the beach it could not restrict use to town residents while if a charitable trust owned

the beach, the town could not legally appropriate money for maintenance or improvements without, in either case, a special act of the Legislature. On account of this dilemma and because many townspeople had other ideas for a war memorial, the idea of thus using the beach was abandoned by the committee.

About every 2 years, the war years excepted, the question of State acquisition of Duxbury Beach has been raised in one form or another and many times bills have been introduced into the Legislature to accomplish this.

Between 1929 and 1950, however, a period of more than 20 years, these threats were defeated by Duxbury's able and watchful representatives in the Legislature with such assistance as they requested from the selectmen and the Duxbury Beach Association trustees; but no special effort was required during this period by Duxbury people in general.

#### Big Test

In 1950, however, Duxbury had the biggest fight on its hands since 1929. The Legislative Committee on Fisheries and Wildlife

minimum on account of the great danger of loss by storm. The situation is aggravated by the fact that beach grass and other vegetation alone maintains the sand dunes at a height which affords some protection to the beach, and the parking areas which most need this protection are at the same points where

public use of the beach destroys the beach grass. From time to time the town has furnished the Beach Association with worn out planks from the bridge and the Association has constructed sand fences in an effort to build up protective sand dunes. At times moderately successful, its effect

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in recent years has been largely negated by beach parties using sand fences for bonfires.

Rather than ending with bonfires may I be forgiven for closing this history with a personal word. Last Sunday I spend many hours on the beach. I saw Duxbury small fry playing in the sand and their older brothers

Land scheduled a hearing on the Governor's proposal to create a recreation authority and on the report of a special recess commission recommending State acquisition of ocean beaches including Duxbury Beach and Crane's Beach in Ipswich.

A preliminary meeting was held at the Winsor House on April 14 at which Senator Edward Stone, Representative Nathaniel Tilden, town officials and representative Duxbury citizens were present. Then came a mass meeting at the high school auditorium on April 19.

Many Duxbury citizens raised funds and arranged for transportation to the hearings; obtained signatures on the petition to the Legislature, planned the speaking program for the hearings, and otherwise organized Duxbury's opposition. A full account of the Duxbury presentation at the Legislative Hearing on May 4 appeared in the *Duxbury Clipper* on May 11. The opposition was so strong the proposals for the creation of a recreation authority and for acquisition of specific beaches were both defeated in the Legislature.

A history of Duxbury Beach would be incomplete without some reference to its physical characteristics. Duxbury citizens know that the beach has tended to recede and move westward and that severe storms when accompanied by high tides cause the waters of Massachusetts Bay to sweep over the beach. This characteristic has made it costly to maintain parking areas both at the bridge and at the north end, and has tended to keep construction of buildings to a

and sisters ironing in the surf; I saw Duxbury families sunning themselves or picnicking at the foot of sand dunes. Then I walked far south of High Pines to enjoy solitude with the birds and the wind and the sea. As I paused to rest the thought came to me that all the effort and planning of the last 3 decades, and all the continued effort and planning now being given, was and is thoroughly worthwhile to preserve this priceless heritage for Duxbury.